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INFO RUEHZL/EUROPEAN POLITICAL COLLECTIVE

RHEHNSC/WHITE HOUSE NATIONAL SECURITY COUNCIL

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SIPDIS

SENSITIVE

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DEPT FOR EUR/SCE, NEA/I (DAS BUTLER)

DOD FOR OSD DASD CAGAN

E.O. 12958: N/A

TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [NATO](#) [MK](#)

SUBJECT: MACEDONIA: SCENESETTER FOR DAS BUTLER AND DASD

CAGAN'S VISIT TO SKOPJE

CONTRIBUTIONS TO THE WAR ON TERROR AND OTHER PKOS

¶1. (SBU) Macedonia is a small but effective contributor to global peace operations. The Army of the Republic of Macedonia (ARM) currently contributes 40 troops to international operations in Iraq; 130 troops to NATO's ISAF mission in Afghanistan; 20 troops to the EUFOR mission in Bosnia-Herzegovina; and 2 soldiers to UNIFIL in Lebanon. The total number of ARM troops deployed is 192, or three percent of the ARM's total forces. The troops in Iraq and Afghanistan are on their tenth deployment rotations.

¶2. (SBU) Macedonia's soldiers have performed well in their missions abroad. They have received US military decorations for valor in Iraq, including several Bronze Stars. Macedonia's participation in Iraq and Afghanistan continues to enjoy strong support across party lines; the Parliament routinely and unanimously approves troop deployments to both countries. The GOM has removed all significant caveats on its troops participating in those operations. We believe Macedonia has contributed as many troops as it can afford to in Afghanistan and Iraq; additional deployments would undermine the progress the Defense Ministry has made in carrying out defense reforms required for NATO membership.

PROGRESS ON NATO MEMBERSHIP

¶3. (SBU) Macedonia has made some progress on NATO-required steps, including strengthening rule of law by stepping up efforts to combat corruption and to implement judicial reforms. The government has made strong progress since the beginning of the year on combating TIP, in stark contrast to the inactivity on the TIP front that characterized its first four months in office. Progress on a religious freedom bill has stalled and is unlikely to be resolved this year, particularly given recent provocative actions in Macedonia by the Serbian and Greek Orthodox Churches.

¶4. (SBU) After several months of negotiations facilitated by the U.S. and EU, the government concluded on May 29 a verbal political agreement with ethnic Albanian opposition party DUI, which ended DUI's boycott of parliament, and has begun to implement it. The government also is moving ahead with phase II of the Framework Agreement-mandated decentralization process, which began July 1. Progress on defense reforms,

stalled for much of the past year, has resumed. Public support for NATO membership remains strong, consistently around 90 percent of those polled.

NAME ISSUE -- THE PERENNIAL THORN

¶ 15. (SBU) The renaming of Skopje Airport as "Alexander the Great Airport," despite strong arguments against doing so, was the Gruevski government's single biggest misstep in dealing with Athens on the perennial name dispute. Since then, Skopje has found itself on the defensive in countering a Greek barrage of public criticism. The Macedonians have made it clear to us that they are willing to enter NATO under the temporary UN designation "FYROM," but increasingly are worried that Athens might follow through on threats to ignore the 1995 Interim Accord and block accession absent a resolution of the name issue.

KOSOVO -- CONTINUED STRONG SUPPORT FOR AHTISAARI PLAN

¶ 16. (SBU) The government continues to express strong public support for the Ahtisaari plan, and for a UNSCR that would implement it. Relations with Pristina are good, with regular high-level meetings between the PISG and GOM officials. The government has indicated it does not want to rush a decision on recognition of an independent Kosovo, but recognizes the importance of not delaying too long; it is likely that it will follow the EU and US lead on recognition.

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